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EDITORS' TABLE.

EDITORS: A. S. PACKARD, JR., AND E. D. COPE.

— The reasons why governments should foster scientific research, are simply those which render it important that the sciences should exist. We take those reasons to be as follows: Firstly, the importance of developing the rational part of the minds of the race coincidentally with progress in other directions. Scientific publications stimulate thought, both by adding to the materials of thought and by opening up new directions for its activity. At the foundation of scientific publication and its functions lies original research, which is the source of all knowledge. The relation of knowledge to the habit of rational thought is obvious. The importance of the rational habit of mind in the individual and in the nation, cannot be over-estimated. It affects the daily intercourse of men more than any other quality, since it is the essential element in morals and in personal viability.

Secondly, scientific research is essentially important in the light which it throws on our physical relations to our environment, and the command it gives us over the resources of the world in the amelioration and elevation of our physical condition. This, popularly spoken of as the primary mission of science, is nevertheless second in order of importance.

Thirdly, the cultivation of science is beneficial to the community in affording material for the pleasurable occupation of time, and through the interest which it evokes, in furnishing an antidote to ever mischievous idleness. Its attractions doubtless serve to divert the mind from activities of a character injurious both to the individual and to the community.

The encouragement and support of scientific research is then, evidently a duty of governments, as involving most important parts of the interests of their peoples. That this has been the opinion of most civilized nations is well known. The great scientific works of many of the European nations are among their chief glories.

The peculiar character of our own government offers an inviting field for the establishment of organizations for the development of knowledge through the aid of the National Treasury; and thanks to the energy of private citizens and others, a number of such organizations have already reflected great credit on our legislators, and have placed American scientific work on a plane with that of the old world. But our opportunity is also our danger.

It is easy to understand that access to the national resources is as open to place hunters as to scientific men, and that personal jealousies and private ambition may hope for easier successes than under any other form of government.

We allude to this subject for the purpose of pointing out two prominent instances of the introduction of demagoguery into scientific politics, so to speak, in the belief that unless "eternal vigilance" is exercised in this direction, scientific interests will undoubtedly lose that influence in the councils of the government, which has hitherto proven so beneficial to the progress of knowledge.

The sentiment has been propagated that our government should not foster scientific research, because it thus becomes "a crushing competitor" of private scientific enterprise.¹ While such an expression as this could not emanate from a scientific man, it might have some influence did not scientific men distinctly repudiate it. We are aware that it has been used with effect in some quarters, by persons who would like to be regarded as scientific men. We maintain that such a sentiment as the above, effectually settles their claim to such consideration. Such language would indeed be quite inexplicable had it not been accompanied by the additional assertion that Congress should employ scientific research for the development of the material resources of the country. This looks like an appeal to the cupidity of legislators in favor of certain kinds of science as against other kinds. If this be so, we believe that this is the first time in our history that any one has sought success for a scientific enterprise by such methods. The custom has been hitherto to appeal to material interests in justification of pure science; and to such a policy on the part of scientists are we indebted for most of our great government works on purely scientific subjects.

But the appearance of tampering with the interests of pure science has been still more evident in certain official documents issued not many months ago.² Specific objections have been made against certain departments by *soi disant* scientists who desire aid for their own specialties. A more short-sighted policy cannot well be conceived; for objections fairly lodged in the minds of Congressmen, can be turned in any direction with great facility. We suggest to our friends, whether all may not suffer alike through the short-sighted selfishness of persons who do not hesitate to push their supposed private interests by attempting to destroy existing institutions which are in the field before them. We ask whether there is not some risk that the government system of subsidies to science, which have been built up at the expense of much talent and toil, may be destroyed through the jealousies of a few unpatriotic persons calling themselves scientific men?

¹ See AM. NATURALIST, March, 1879.

² Report on the Methods of Surveying the Public Domain, Oct., 1878.